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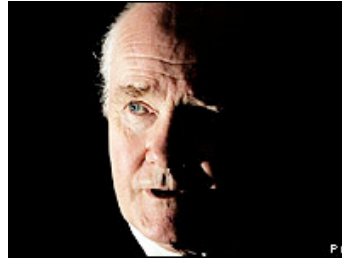
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Resignation adds to Reid pressure

Pressure on home secretary John Reid has increased after it emerged the head of the Youth Justice Board (YJB), Professor Rod Morgan, has quit.



Mr Reid has announced emergency measures to ease overcrowding

Prof Morgan attacked Labour's young offenders policy and said children's prisons were being "swamped".

Mr Reid is already under pressure after calling for judges to avoid jailing all but the most serious offenders in a bid to ease prison overcrowding.

A judge said he did not jail a man who had downloaded child porn as a result.

In an exclusive interview given to BBC Two's Newsnight, Prof Morgan, said youth courts and children's prisons are being "swamped" with minor offenders who are "cluttering up" the system.

'Swamping'

Echoing the crisis with adult prisoner places, he told Newsnight "we're standing on the brink of a prisons crisis. We have tonight lots of people in police cells because there is no space for them in custody and that's true for children and young people also.

"I regard a 26% increase in the number of children and young people that are being drawn into the system in the past three years as swamping", he said.

Prof Morgan became Chair of the Youth Justice Board in April 2004.

He was formerly HM Chief Inspector of Probation for England and Wales, a post he took up in August 2001.

Porn sentence

Mr Morgan's resignation follows opposition attacks on the home secretary over a child pornography case.

Derek Williams, 46, of Blaenau Ffestiniog, told the BBC he was "lucky to be out" but added: "You cannot blame the judge for what he has done. His hands are tied. He was only doing his job."

His six-month term of imprisonment was suspended for two years.

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Mold Crown Court heard Williams had downloaded dozens of pornographic images of children on to his computer.

He pleaded guilty to 10 charges of making indecent photographs between November 2005 and May last year.

In sentencing Judge John Rogers QC said he had to bear in mind "the current sentencing climate".

This week, Mr Reid and other Cabinet ministers wrote to judges and magistrates asking them to imprison only the most dangerous and persistent criminals.

Prison ships

And on Thursday Mr Reid announced the latest emergency measures to deal with the prison crisis.

Jails in England and Wales are at bursting point, with about 80,000 inmates.

Mr Reid revealed an RAF camp in the north of England is to be used to house convicts, and he is also in negotiations over the purchase of two prison ships.

Construction has also started on prefabricated units to go into a prison in Merseyside.

The Lord Chancellor, Lord Falconer, said the letter to judges was not intended to change sentencing principles, but to set out the current context.

Lord Falconer said the judges were not being put under pressure to alleviate prison over-crowding.

HAVE YOUR SAY

“ Overcrowded and full prisons are indicative of a rapidly increasing crime rate ”

Gordon, Southampton

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"It is our problem....We are not for one moment saying that it is a problem for judges to solve. We are all doing our bit in the system to help in the current circumstances."

'Public confidence'

Shadow home secretary David Davis said of the sentencing: "We now have a situation where sentences are being dictated by the prison capacity and not the severity of the crime.

"It looks like the consequences of the government's failure to address the lack of prison places is coming home to roost."

Liberal Democrat home affairs spokesman Nick Clegg said: "This is the inevitable domino effect of a government lurching about in blind panic trying to solve a prison overcrowding crisis of its own making."

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